



STATE OF NEVADA
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
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MINUTES
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
10:00am
Thursday, March 12, 2009

University of Nevada, Reno Campus, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, Fleischman Agriculture Building, Conference Room 214, Reno, NV 89557

The Nevada State Conservation Commission held a public meeting on Thursday, March 12, 2009 in Reno, Nevada. The State Conservation Commission considered and acted on the following items on March 12, 2009 beginning at 10:00am:

March 12, 2009 10:00am:

- I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Keith Whipple called the meeting to order at 10:05am
 - A. **Introductions** – Commissioners present: Keith Whipple, Lincoln County CD; Joe Sicking, Paradise/Sonoma CD; Chris Freeman, Nevada Tahoe CD; Eric Rieman, Carson Valley CD; Donna Lamm, Southern Nye County CD; Ed Foster, NV Dept. of Agriculture; Dr. Rangesan Narayanan, UNR College of Agriculture
Others Present – Jim Lawrence, Acting Administrator, NV Division of Conservation Districts; Kelly McGowan, NV Division of CDs; Sandi Gotta, NV Division of CDs; Bob Conrad, NV Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Mark Williams, Farm Services Agency; Pam Griswold, Nevada Association of Conservation Districts; Gary Johnson, BLM; Patrick Gubbins, BLM; Doran Sanchez, BLM; Dr. Ronald Pardini, Acting Dean of Agriculture, UNR; Bill Elder, NRCS; Kerry Benson, Deputy Attorney General, NV Attorney General's Office; Dr. Ron Pardini, Acting Dean of Agriculture, UNR
- Welcome:** Dr. Pardini welcomed the commission to UNR. Dr. Pardini is the current Acting Dean in the absence of Dr. David Thawley. Dr. Thawley suffered a brain injury in an accident and is undergoing rehabilitation therapy. The Commission wished Dr. Thawley a quick recovery. Dr. Pardini updated the Commission on recent activities and was glad to see the scheduled afternoon tour of the research activities at the greenhouse(s).
- II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA - *ACTION***

The agenda was approved as written via a motion to approve by Commissioner Freeman, seconded by Commissioner Rieman and commission approved.
- III. REVIEW, AMENDMENT AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES - *ACTION***

Approval of Minutes October 20 and 22, 2008: A motion to approve the minutes as written by Commissioner Rieman, was seconded by Commissioner Sicking and commission approved.
- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS**
 - A. Three minute time limit per person. – None

V. DIVISION REPORTS TO THE COMMISSION

A. Status of the Division of Conservation Districts

1. General – Jim Lawrence: Mr. Lawrence reviewed the current financial report for FY09. He explained that with various budget reductions, reduction scenario requests, and uncertainty, staff has been very conservative in spending. This included travel expenditures, so staff was not able to travel to attend CD meetings as much as they would have liked to. However, now that it is close to the end of the budget year, they may be able to assist districts and attend more meetings with the travel balance remaining. Mr. Lawrence explained that he will discuss the budget submittal for FY10-11 later in the agenda.
2. General/Correspondence – Kelly McGowan & Sandi Gotta:
 - a) Mr. McGowan reviewed the current Performance Measurements and explained the items that the office staff measures to track goal achievement. Mr. Lawrence commented on Measurement Indicator #1 (Ratio: The ratio of dollars generated by districts for every dollar of State grants they received) which is 17.5:1. The Legislature reviews measurement indicators and commended the conservation districts ability to match state funding at such a high ratio.
 - b) The District Report Logs, Agenda Logs, and Minute Logs were reviewed by staff. The reports are also posted on the website. Mrs. Gotta reported that she is encouraged that CDs are looking at the logs and verifying the entries. Mrs. Gotta also reported that there are some changes that have been made to the website including posting a few of the district's annual reports to provide a snapshot of activities throughout the state.
 - c) Kerry Benson, Attorney General's office explained a letter concerning the Open Meeting Law (OML) that CD staff mailed to all conservation districts for their information. The letter by Catherine Cortez Masto, Attorney General, dated February 11, 2009 explains the opinion that the public comment period listed on an agenda should not be limited to items that are not on the meeting's agenda, and doing so limits public comment and the intent of the OML.

VI. REPORTS TO THE COMMISSION

*This section is reserved for partnering agency personnel to update the commission on any news or events of importance. ***DISCUSSION****

A. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Allen Biaggi: Bob Conrad, DCNR reported in Mr. Biaggi's absence and expressed Mr. Biaggi's regrets for not being able to attend. Mr. Conrad reported that there have been three legislative budget hearings so far, however the department's budget situation will probably not be known for sure until the end of the session. The Director's office is also closely monitoring legislation as well as stimulus funding. It currently looks like the department may be receiving stimulus funding for clean water, brownfields, drinking water, and various forestry activities. Mr. Lawrence added that the Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF) is interested in partnering with conservation districts to implement fire rehabilitation and fuel reduction projects using NDFs funding. It is still in the beginning phases, so no additional information is available at this time. Mr. Whipple asked that this item be included on the next agenda.

B. Department of Agriculture – Edward K. Foster: The Department of Agriculture is also reviewing their budget submittal in the legislature as well as following legislative bills. In addition, Mr. Foster reported the following:

1. The new building will be ready to move into on July 1, 2009.
2. Mormon Crickets education outreach activities are being done in the rural counties. Next week the Department of Agriculture will be starting the survey and sanitary inspections from exportation of Nevada products.
3. They are currently able to manage emergency events only with wild horses. Thirty-three horses were sent to a sanctuary in Oregon as well as some sent to Texas.

C. University of Nevada, Reno – Dr. Rangesan Narayanan: Dr. Rang reported that Dr. Dean Thawley is currently in New Zealand undergoing therapy from his Dec. 9th accident which caused a brain injury. It is hopeful that he will be back by April, and is reported doing well. The commission again wished him a speedy recovery.

UNR has had successful student recruitments from their website which resulted in about 950 new students. The University has also implemented an on-line 'Major Matcher' tool for students.

The current budget contains about 70% research and 20% teaching expenses. They are working through required budget cuts which will include reductions to the college and staff.

Federal appropriations include a program called Nevada Rangeland Initiative in the amount of \$400,000 for outreach and looks like it will be expanding. He hopes to work with conservation districts with this program in the future.

FAPRI, Food and Agricultural Research Institute – This program reports to Congress on agricultural practices affecting the United States. The University is now part of the national group and will include the rangeland component.

Great Basin Environmental Program – Now part of the federal budget. The program is currently in the planning stage, which will be followed up with implementation funding.

D. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Bruce Petersen: The Commission welcomed Mr. Petersen as the new State Conservationist in Nevada. He is formerly from Wyoming NRCS where he served as their State Conservationist. He just attended a teleconference on the Farm Bill and current stimulus funding for NRCS. Farm Bill funding is still on hold until the rules are finalized. NRCS held a state technical committee meeting last week that was teleconferenced throughout the state. Mr. Petersen thought it was well attended and received good input on their programs. It appears that some stimulus funding could include funding for flood easements, flood restoration activities, and PL566 projects. The commission welcomed Mr. Peterson and looks forward to working with him.

E. Farm Service Agency – Gus Wegren (Acting SD): - Mark Williams reported in place of Gus Wegren, Acting Director. A new State Director should be selected by the middle of April. Mr. Williams discussed the new SUR program for disaster relief funding, which is not in place yet but will be soon. The Livestock Indemnity Program, Livestock Feed Program for fire, drought, and death of livestock program was discussed.

Mr. Williams discussed the loan program of which \$127 million has already been utilized and additional funding is being requested. The funding is being used at a higher rate than it has in past years.

F. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts – Pam Griswold: Mrs. Griswold is the new president of the Nevada Association of Conservation District elected at the November meeting in Jackpot. She expressed her interest in moving the NvACD forward with new projects and programs. She is developing a new website as well as developing a database so she can communicate with all district supervisors statewide.

She would like to implement a program to build and monitor Kestrel and Wood Duck breeding boxes. The boxes (that would be made by high school woodshop classes) will contain cameras so schools can participate by watching young birds from eggs to flight. She envisions the NDF, NDOW, schools and others to be partners with conservation districts in this program.

The next NvACD annual meeting is scheduled for November 3 and 4, 2009 in Fallon. She requested ideas of program presentations and areas of interest. She is sending out a questionnaire to CD chairs requesting their ideas to improve NvACD in assisting conservation districts and their concerns statewide.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

- A. **Review the Governor recommended budget for the Division and the grants to districts program.** Mr. Lawrence reviewed the Division's budget that was submitted to the Legislature as the Governor Recommended budget for FY10-11. The budget included the required reductions from the Governor due to the state's declining revenue and represented about a 14% total reduction in the overall budget. The division was asked to do various scenarios as to how the reductions would affect the division. Reductions included decreasing the Administrative Assistant from a full-time position to a part-time position. Reductions were made in In-State and Out-Of-State Travel. The Training budget was eliminated. He explained that the division's goal was to attempt to keep the CD grant program whole so that it did not affect the \$5,000 grant to districts,

however it became apparent after making reductions in all areas that it would not meet the reduction target. In speaking to commission members, it was suggested to reduce the district grants from \$5,000 to \$4,200 per district in lieu of making additional staffing reductions. It is hoped that if any additional funds become available in the future, that the grants can be supplemented. The budget is now being reviewed by the legislature. The adopted budget will probably not be known until the end of the session.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion on the proposed development of renewable energy sources on large tracts of the Bureau of Land Management's public land. Potential role of the commission and individual conservation districts. - *ACTION* -

Gary Johnson, Deputy Director for Minerals, BLM presented the geothermal program with BLM. He stated that the geothermal program is by far the biggest mineral program in Nevada on federal lands. Currently there are 370 leases on 644,574 acres. They expect to double the program in 2-3 years. There are currently 10 power plants and potentially 10 additional power plants in the near future. He explained the National Programmatic Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for geothermal activities. One way the BLM is working to handle the additional demand for permits is by holding a workshop with industry personnel to explain the process and assist them with information.

Patrick Gubbins, Branch Chief for Non Renewable Resources, BLM talked about wind and solar energy source activities. He passed out a map of solar and wind projects. There are currently 35 solar applications in Nevada, most of which are in southern Nevada. EIS's will need to be done before these are approved or denied. Currently there are 75 wind proposals. The permit applications are required to go through the NEPA process before they are approved. Concerns such as migratory bird impacts and Sage Grouse concerns are addressed at that time. BLM expressed their concern about those impacts and they are working with the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team as well as working with NDOW to address these issues. The commission thanked them for attending the meeting and providing information.

B. Review and discussion on proposed bills that could affect conservation districts. Bills to be discussed may include noxious weeds, surface and ground water, rangeland health, fire prevention, fire rehabilitation, farmland protection, livestock grazing, wildlife and habitat, soil erosion, forest health, etc. *ACTION*

Kelly McGowan provided a short list of the legislative bills that office staff is watching that may affect conservation districts. A copy of the current proposed language was provided for each listed bill. Specific bills of interest that were discussed included:

SB106 – Revises provisions governing the purchase of a home or improved lot that is adjacent to open range.

SB32 – Makes various changes to the Open Meeting Law.

SB110 – Authorizes the State Quarantine Officer to adopt regulations specifying a schedule of administrative fines for certain violations relating to noxious weeds.

SB199 – Revises provisions governing the weighing of farm vehicles for purposes of vehicle registration.

SB39 – Eliminates the requirement that the State Department of Agriculture provide annual proposed programs for the control of invasive species and certain endemic pests and weeds to counties.

C. Preview of district photos and written documentation of district activities funded by AB 629 funds from the last legislative session. *ACTION*

Sandi Gotta reviewed the district reports that have been received so far describing the activities that were implemented with the funding provided by Assembly Bill 629. The reports were requested by division staff to be used as an informational tool. Sandi is working on a CD that will be provided to the legislature to thank them for the additional one-time funding. It is envisioned that the CD will be interactive, user-friendly and include categories by geographical location and/or category i.e. education, noxious weeds, equipment, watershed restoration, etc. She requested

additional comments from the commission on ideas of CD development. Sandi also suggested the CD could be used for other purposes for additional audiences as well. The CD for the legislature would include a letter of thanks from the Commission, and she requested a letter from NvACD to be included also. Staff expressed their thanks to the districts that supplied the information to the office. Commissioner Freeman suggested including a list of supervisors and their contact information. Commissioner Freeman made a motion to send a letter to Assemblyman James Settlemyer thanking him for supporting the funding and including it on the CD, seconded by Commissioner Lamm and commission approved. Commissioner Sicking suggested that a similar CD be sent to county commissioners to educate them about what conservation districts are and their activities. Commissioner Sicking moved to develop a CD that could be sent to county commissioners, seconded by Commissioner Lamm and commissioner approved.

IX. STAFF ITEMS – Division Staff Comments

A. Unless otherwise listed with a topic description, this portion of the agenda is limited to announcements and discussions proposed for action at future meetings.

1. Mrs. Gotta informed the commission that the Strategic Plan that was developed by the commission will expire in 2010 and needs to be updated. She asked the members to take the current plan home and be ready to discuss updates and ideas for the next meeting. Commissioner Freeman mentioned that it may be possible to have Ray Ledgerwood out to assist in a strategic planning session again.

X. COMMISSIONER ITEMS

A. Comments, Reports, Items to be included on the next agenda. – None.

XI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Three-minute time limit per person. – None.

XII. NEXT COMMISSION MEETING - *ACTION*

- A. Set time and place – Mr. McGowan informed the commission that the next meeting will include a review of CD Budgets and Workplans for FY10 with a reminder to conservation districts that they are due to the office by June 1st.
- B. Agenda Items – Next meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2009 at 10:00am in Carson City.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT – *ACTION* - Commissioner Freeman moved to adjourn the meeting and attend the tour of the UNR greenhouse, seconded by Commissioner Rieman and commission approved.

XIV. TOUR OF THE UNIVERSITY FARM AND THE GREENHOUSE OPERATIONS. KEVIN PIPER

The Commission toured the University Farm Greenhouse operations where they are studying cheatgrass and other species. Elizabeth Leger, Assistant Professor of Plant Ecology explained the studies and how the greenhouse(s) help their research. The group also visited a greenhouse where they are studying hydroponic vegetables. The greenhouse complex is opening the door to further horticultural innovation. In an aeroponic environment, plants grow without soil in a misted, nutrient-rich solution. In hydroponics, plants grow by receiving minerals in an all-water-and-nutrient environment.

*Note: *ACTION* Denotes items on which the Commission may take action. Action may occur on the topic or during the general Committee Discussion.*